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## DAVID FRIEDRICH STRAUSS.

By GUSTAV KRÜGER,  
Giessen.

SOME years ago Eduard Zeller, who is spending the evening of a long life in learned leisure at Stuttgart, published a selection of the letters of his friend Strauss.<sup>1</sup> The personality of Strauss was already well known to us from his published books<sup>2</sup> and from personal notices in his *Literarische Denkwürdigkeiten*, as well as from what Zeller has told us in his friend's biography<sup>3</sup> published shortly after the death of Strauss. We become still better acquainted with him through his letters, which exhibit his mental development and maturity, his struggles, conflicts, doubts, and recovered faith, and reveal him as a man of integrity, into whose clear, thoughtful eyes we can look with warmest sympathy. Even one who is not concerned with the scientific questions which naturally occupy a large place in these letters, especially one who is interested, if only a little, in philosophical, æsthetic, and theological problems, will find himself richly rewarded by reading them. One thing only we miss: instead of having only Strauss' side in learned or personal discussion, or in friendly

<sup>1</sup> *Ausgewählte Briefe von David Friedrich Strauss*. Herausgegeben und erläutert von EDUARD ZELLER. Mit einem Porträt in Lichtdruck. Bonn: Emil Strauss, 1895.

<sup>2</sup> *Gesammelte Schriften von David Friedrich Strauss*. Nach des Verfassers letztwilligen Verfügungen zusammengestellt. Eingeleitet und mit erklärenden Nachweisungen versehen von EDUARD ZELLER. Mit zwei Portraits des Verfassers in Stahlstich. 12 Bände. Bonn: Emil Strauss, 1876-8. (New editions of the separate works of Strauss are still being continually published.)

<sup>3</sup> *David Friedrich Strauss, in seinem Leben und in seinen Schriften geschildert* von EDUARD ZELLER. Bonn: Emil Strauss, 1874 (English translation, 1874). Cf. *David Friedrich Strauss und die Theologie seiner Zeit*, von DR. A. HAUSRATH, 2 Bände. Heidelberg: Fr. Bassermann, 1876, 1878. SAMUEL ECK, *David Friedrich Strauss*, Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta'sche Nachfolger, 1899; an excellent book. A severe criticism of Strauss, which, however, does not concern so much the author of *The Life of Jesus* as that of *The Old and New Faith*, will be found in the *Unzeitgemässen Betrachtungen*, of FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE (Erstes Stück: "David Strauss, der Bekenner und Schriftsteller," *Werke*, Band 1).

intercourse with others, one would have prized the replies of his correspondents. The model of such a correspondence, as we have it in the case of Goethe and Schiller, shows what can be learned in this way. How two contrasted natures, which yet have deep inward affinity, regarded themselves and their universe would have been clearly exhibited, for example, in an interchange of letters between Strauss and Vischer.

These letters have awakened in myself and many others fresh thoughts of their author's significance for us all, especially in connection with theological science. He has been much stigmatized as a heretic. On many, even yet, his name produces the effect which a red rag produces on a bull. Many others regard him as an ally in their conflict against all that bears the name of the Christian religion and church. One cannot flatly declare both to be wrong: like all extremes, the two sides meet, and, indeed, in a very essential point; both of them regard Christianity and the church, as also Christianity and faith in dogma, as equivalent. The praise and blame of these opposing parties can easily be understood, since both church and dogma—taking these words in their ordinary sense—have been attacked and severely wounded by Strauss. Finally, moreover, he himself, in the last phase of his literary career, unfortunately undertook, what till then had been quite foreign to him, the identification of the two conceptions and identified Christianity with church and dogma, thereby contributing not a little to confusion of judgment.

At the close of this century, on whose intellectual history Strauss has at all events had vast influence, it is worth our while seriously to review these questions. This, I think, can now be done impartially a quarter of a century after his death. Certainly the questions raised by Strauss take too fast hold of us all to allow us to approach them quite coolly and, so to speak, impersonally. The subject which I purpose here to discuss is still for me a highly personal one, and I neither can nor ought to wish that my readers should regard it wholly with my eyes. Before proceeding with my task, however, may I be allowed briefly to recapitulate the dates of Strauss' life, with which American readers are not so familiar as we Germans?

## I.

Born at Ludwigsburg in Württemberg January 17, 1808, Strauss studied philosophy and theology, and received his education in the theological seminary (*Stift*) at Tübingen. After a brief vicarship (1830) in a little country parish, which long remembered him with affection, he acted as professor's substitute at the seminary of Maulbronn. In the winter of 1831-2 he went to Berlin to attend the lectures of Hegel and Schleiermacher. On his return in 1832 he was appointed lecturer (*Repetent*) at Tübingen and gave also lectures in philosophy. In consequence of the storm occasioned by the appearance of his *Leben Jesu*<sup>4</sup> in 1835 he was removed to Ludwigsburg as professor's substitute. Here he remained only a short time, and, having quitted the service of the state, he lived in private life from 1836 until his death. Only once, in 1839, he seemed on the point of resuming an academic vocation. He had received a call to Zürich as professor of dogmatics and church history; but, in consequence of the opposition of the conservative party in the canton, he was set aside before he could assume the office. Out of a course of lectures which he had been planning for Zürich grew his work, *Die christliche Glaubenslehre, etc.*<sup>5</sup> In the year 1842 Strauss married the distinguished artist Agnes Schebest, by whom he had a daughter and a son. After five years this marriage was practically dissolved, with the consent of both parties, though without a legal separation. Zeller thus writes with delicacy: "Strauss lacked a regular course of work away from home, and at home that mutual harmony of disposition for the want of which nothing, however valuable, can compensate." In the revolutionary year 1848 Strauss was for a time the deputy from his native town in the diet of Württemberg, but, having incurred the hostility of his constituents by his unexpectedly conservative attitude on political questions, he led from that time a long migratory life in Munich, Weimar, Cologne,

<sup>4</sup> *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. Translated from the fourth (1840) German edition by George Eliot. London and New York, 1846; second edition 1892.

<sup>5</sup> "The Christian Doctrine of Faith in its Historical Development and in its Conflict with Modern Science." 2 vols. Tübingen, 1840, 1841.

Heidelberg, Heilbronn, again in Munich, in Darmstadt, and finally in Ludwigsburg, where he died February 8, 1874. After the appearance of his *Glaubenslehre* he for a long time abandoned theology and devoted himself to writing biographical works. We have the ripe fruits of his labors in this line in his works on the Schwabian poet Christian Daniel Schubart (1849); Christian Märklin, a friend of Strauss (1851); the humanist Nicodemus Frischlin (1855); Ulrich von Hutten (1857, revised 1871); Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1862); and Voltaire (1870).<sup>6</sup> The last of these works arose out of communications made to the grand-duchess Alice of Hesse, originally princess of Great Britain.

His interest in theological problems was keenly revived by the work on Hutten, and from the beginning of his sixtieth year he was engaged on a revised form of the *Leben Jesu*. In 1864 appeared the new *Leben Jesu*, with the additional title, "for the German people,"<sup>7</sup> and soon after the two polemical works, *Der Christus des Glaubens und der Jesus der Geschichte*, and *Die Halben und die Ganzen*, treatises with various controversial points of enduring value. The year 1870 produced the two patriotic letters to Ernest Renan, in which Strauss, with the unanimous approbation of the nation, maintained the rights of Germany. Finally in 1870 he claimed the interest of all the cultured and partially cultured with his last book, *Der Alte und der Neue Glaube, ein Bekenntniss*.<sup>8</sup>

## II.

Whoever would estimate the personality and work of Strauss finds himself at the outset confronted with the question: "In what class should we rank this man? Was he a scholar, or was he a literary artist?" These questions cannot be answered with

<sup>6</sup> *Schubarts Leben in seinen Briefen*, 2 vols., Berlin, 1849; *Christian Märklin, ein Lebens- und Characterbild aus der Gegenwart*, Mannheim, 1851; *Leben und Schriften Nikodemus Frischlins*, Frankfurt, 1855; *Ulrich von Hutten*, Leipzig, 1857; 4th edition, 1878; English condensed translation, 1874; *Hermann Samuel Reimarus*, Leipzig, 1862; *Voltaire, sechs Vorträge*, Leipzig, 1870; 5th edition, 1878.

<sup>7</sup> Fourth edition 1877; English translation, London, 1865, 2 vols.

<sup>8</sup> Eleventh edition, Bonn, 1881; English translation by Mathilde Blind, London and New York, 1873.

a plain yes or no. We can say that he was neither a half-scholar nor a half-artist, if these terms involve any idea of half-heartedness, no trace of which is found in Strauss' character. He had, however, something of many diverse qualities: he had not merely two, but many, souls bound up in his person. The desire of conjugal affection in its highest sense and of friendship with men in its purest form contended in him with the impulse toward solitude and forgetfulness of the world; and the theologian and the philosopher, the historian and the poet, and not least the musician, strove in him for the mastery. He possessed a genuine measure of all these elements: the *Leben Jesu*, the *Glaubenslehre*, the *Streitschriften*,<sup>9</sup> and *Der Alte und der Neue Glaube* reveal him as the theologian and philosopher; *Hutten* and *Voltaire*, not to speak of minor works, such as his *Essays*,<sup>10</sup> exhibit him as the historian and biographer; the appendices to *Der Alte und der Neue Glaube* and many utterances of genius in his letters display him as the connoisseur of music; and the *Poetische Gedenkbuch* as the poet. We have still but few German writers since Lessing whose style, in purity and distinction, can be compared to that of Strauss. Perhaps he was least of all what he has been most usually considered, a man of strict science. In the *Literarische Denkwürdigkeiten* he admits this in words to this effect: "I have never regarded myself as properly speaking a scholar: my learning consists only in my having been sufficiently grounded and instructed in general knowledge; as to particular departments I am sufficiently disciplined to be able, in those branches of science with which I am at any time occupied, to assimilate rapidly the mass of facts required in their pursuit. With me this knowledge and its acquirement are never an end, but only a means. The collecting of materials, even when some of them, according to the subject, interest and delight me, I find always in a measure irksome. My real enjoyment begins with the composition and manipulation of the material. Then when I feel that the clay is plastic in my hand, and that it readily, and in a manner spontaneously, assumes the forms which my

<sup>9</sup> *Streitschriften zur Vertheidigung meiner Schrift über das Leben Jesu* (1837).

<sup>10</sup> *Charakteristiken und Kritiken*, 1839; 2d ed., 1844.

fingers seek to impress upon it, I consciously enjoy my talent; and it is certainly my special talent." To his most intimate friend, Pfarrer Rapp, he writes: "What scientific work I have done I have wrought at with passion; and without passion, without being possessed by my subject, I can do nothing at all. On this side I am a poet, though indeed I am this still less than a scholar, since I lack entirely the requisite productivity of fancy and creative power." And to Friedrich Theodor Vischer: "I am not inventive; but I can arrange, group, and describe well." And again to Rapp: "I am an artist, but not by the grace of God, who has no doubt given me the artistic bent and the sense of form, but not imagination in order perfectly to fuse those forms."

He often complains of the two-sided incoherent quality of his mental endowment. Possessing almost too keen a sense of his defects and weaknesses, he seldom attains a perfect consciousness of his ability, and he could truly say of himself: "In the course of my life I have failed oftener through diffidence than through pride." Of course there is plenty of pure scholarship in his writings, especially the theological. The critical discussions, which occur in the *Leben Jesu*, even in the so-called popular edition, are undoubtedly beyond what might be sought in a work designed for laymen as well as scholars. Personally I confess to a little skeptical admiration when I have heard laymen tell me that they have read the *Leben Jesu* from end to end. Nevertheless Strauss, with his investigations, has not promoted scholarly criticism nearly so much as did the Tübingen theologian, Ferdinand Christian Baur. He always clearly felt, and readily acknowledged, the superiority of the latter, although Baur, through the unfriendly and prejudiced attitude which, at least to Strauss' mind, he held toward the work of our author, did not make that acknowledgment easy for him. Yet Strauss was conscious that Baur and his learned auxiliaries owed much to him. He wrote to his friend Märklin: "Baur should remember that my style of work was just adapted for the beginning, and that without my initiative he and his allies would not stand where they now do." He compared his *Leben Jesu* to the bold assault which expels an opponent by night from a strong

position, and Baur's investigations to the slow siege-work which gradually deprives an enemy of one part of his stronghold after another.

What would this man have been and what would he have accomplished had he been allowed to continue in the academic vocation for which he was born and which he had himself chosen? As a young tutor at Tübingen he had made a very great impression. Zeller, who there heard him, says that his lectures had the effect of a beneficent rain upon a parched district. He praises the lucidity of his process of thought and the racy freshness of his exposition, which rendered even so tough a subject as Hegel's *Logik* enjoyable to his hearers. And though Strauss, according to the fashion then common in south Germany, always, while lecturing, followed his skilfully prepared notes, the formal excellence of his finished delivery charmed his hearers.

Strauss never ceased to bewail his removal from the academic chair as the severest blow he ever received, and the leisure which his academic friends often envied him was a small thing compared with the vast stimulus which professorial activity would have given him. Yet he did not regret the step which had cost him his position. He well knew what he risked when he published the *Leben Jesu*, but he claimed, in its preface, the possession of one thing which the most learned and acute theologians lacked, inward emancipation of spirit and thought from certain religious and dogmatic presuppositions. "If the theologians find my work un-Christian because it is without presuppositions, I find theirs unscientific on account of the presuppositions of faith." Thirty years later he wrote that it had been the aim of his theological writings from the first to break the chain which barred the haven of theology from the open sea of rational science. This man could not have said with Goethe's Mephistopheles:

Das Beste, was du wissen kannst,  
Darfst du den Buben doch nicht sagen."<sup>11</sup>

On the contrary, he was impelled irresistibly to say what was laid upon his spirit.

<sup>11</sup> "You dare not tell striplings the best of your knowledge."



But he who thus threw down the gauntlet to a whole world of opponents could certainly not expect that others would respond with kid gloves. We can understand the difficulty in which those were placed who had to decide if one who pronounced the presuppositions of the theological work of his time to be unscientific had a right to occupy a professor's chair, since those prepossessions appeared to be indispensable.

But, on the other hand, Strauss' ideas were not strange to the best spirits of his time. Whoever, after the lapse of two generations, looks back upon the scientific work which has been done since the appearance of the *Leben Jesu*, knows that Strauss was right when he wrote in the preface to his translation of Hutten's *Dialogues*<sup>12</sup> which he published in 1860, when the *Leben Jesu* was a quarter of a century old:

I can certify that my book has not yet been refuted; its ideas have only received continuous development, and if it is now little more read, it is because it has been absorbed by the culture of the age and has penetrated through all the veins of contemporary science. I can certify that, through the twenty-five intervening years, not a line of importance has been written on the subjects of which it treats, in which its influence is not recognizable.

This may be deemed exaggeration. I am inclined to regard it as correct; but in any case one must subscribe to that recognition of Strauss' courage which King Wilhelm of Württemberg thus bluntly expressed: "That he had courage I have always believed, else he would not have tackled the theologians as he did." And no one can read without emotion the words in which Strauss spoke of his book in the connection just quoted:

I could be angry with my book because it has wrought me much harm: it has excluded me from public work as a teacher, for which I had taste and perhaps talent; it has wrenched me out of natural conditions, and thrust me into unnatural ones; it has made my life lonely. And yet when I think what would have become of me had I stifled the word which was laid upon my soul, and had I suppressed the doubts that were fermenting in me, then I bless the book, which indeed harmed me outwardly, but which has preserved inward health for me and many others. So I testify in its day of honor that it was written out of a pure impulse, and I could wish for all its opponents, when they write against it, that they were equally free from by-aims and fanaticism.

<sup>12</sup> *Gespräche Huttens, übersetzt und erläutert*, Leipzig, 1860.

## III.

One cannot easily overestimate the impression produced more than sixty years ago by the bold undertaking of the twenty-seven-year-old lecturer at Tübingen to overturn from its very foundation the view hitherto entertained as to the life of Jesus. This impression is most strikingly attested by the appearance of four substantial editions of the work in two volumes, containing more than 1,400 closely printed pages, a work designed, it must be remembered, not for the general public, but for scholars. It was also attested by the innumerable hostile works issuing, not only from all theological camps, but also from laymen who, regarding the holiest articles of their faith as in danger, came out to battle against the audacious assailant.

What were the fundamental ideas of the work?

It is usually supposed that the book was directed against the naïve credulity which accepts, without question or interpretation, the miraculous events of the life of Jesus as divine revelation, just as they are recorded in the gospels. From a scientific point of view this is incorrect. Such a consideration of the gospel history did not fall within Strauss' horizon. The book had a very definite object, viz., to combat the method of so-called rationalism in view of its naturalistic mode of explaining the miracles. The life of Jesus having been already, in the eighteenth century, regarded by some from a human point of view, they sought to explain the miraculous elements of the history in two ways. Some of them spoke of a vulgar fraud on the part of the heavenly persons who performed all these things, and this is the position of the so-called Wolfenbüttel fragmentist, Hermann Samuel Reimarus († 1768). By others a natural explanation was attempted, for example by the Heidelberg theologian, Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761–1851) and his numerous associates and successors. They purged, so to speak, the whole gospel history of its miraculous elements, at the same time introducing natural explanations or supposing errors on the part of reporters. I need only adduce the oft-quoted example: Jesus, according to this method, did not walk on the sea, but by the sea—which very ingenious interpretation

gave occasion to the witty question of Lavater, if then the evangelists who relate this miracle wished to teach us by it that Jesus was capable of walking on solid ground like other men. From this method also came the explanation of the resurrection as an awakening from apparent death, and of the ascension as a disappearance in a mountain cloud, and other home-made discoveries of the same sort. They have still a claim on our attention as being the first awkward attempts at a humanistic view of the life of Jesus.

In opposition to this naturalistic and rationalistic view Strauss brought in another, viz., the mythical view, in accordance with which he maintained that the gospel narratives should, in so far as they represent anything in a legendary way, be subjected to investigation; and that this applies, indeed, to everything without exception which our evangelists found in the Christian community of their time and received from oral tradition with good faith in its authenticity. There was no intimation of free conscious invention on the part of one or several individuals, as in a theory brought forward not long afterward by another radical critic, Bruno Bauer. Strauss supposed an unintentional and unconscious idealization of the whole material. Not that he sought to prove that the whole gospel history was mythical; but, as he says in his preface: "I shall critically examine all that is in it to see if it contains anything mythical."

This was a procedure not without precedent, if we consider other departments of science. For the general science of antiquity the philologist Heyne, of Göttingen, had already proved that the whole early history of mankind, as well as our forefathers philosophical view of the world, is based upon myth.<sup>13</sup> In the year 1811 appeared Niebuhr's celebrated work which applied this view to the oldest part of Roman history, and deprived the myths related by Livy concerning the seven kings of their right of existence in the scientific treatment of history. Theologians had also already applied the new method to the five books of Moses in the Old Testament. Nay, even in the realm of New Testament history Strauss had had predecessors. Schleiermacher, as well as Hase, in their public lectures—the latter even

<sup>13</sup> *A mythis omnis priscorum hominum cum historia tum philosophia procedit.*

in a small handbook which appeared in 1829—had broken to a certain extent with the natural explanation, and had sought by the assumption of myth to explain the beginning and the end of the gospel history—the birth and ascension of Christ—at least in part. Strauss no doubt refers to these attempts when he says: “The entrance to the gospel history as well as the exit from it is supposed to be through the portal of myth. For all that lies between those points the crooked and toilsome path of natural explanation is deemed sufficient.”

From the scientific treatises of that period, which certainly were not very thorough, Strauss derived the view that the sources of primitive Christian history, in whole and in part, are not of first rank, that is, do not come direct from eyewitnesses; and from all the conflicting narratives, the inaccuracies, the chronological and other difficulties, he drew the conclusion that the testimony of one reporter was of as much value as that of another, viz., none at all. In order to explain the state of the facts, however, he specially directed attention to the Old Testament with its Messianic ideas and hopes: the Messianic expectations of the time of Jesus were above all what produced the myths of the life of Jesus. This appeared with special clearness from the narrative of the evangelist Matthew, with its ever-recurring phrases: “This happened that it might be fulfilled which was written,” and, “As saith the prophet.” Nevertheless Strauss was far from denying the historical personality of Jesus; he was convinced, on the other hand, that the application of those Messianic ideas to the concrete instance could only be explained by the existence of a powerful faith-compelling personality. Therefore he held fast to the main facts in the life of Jesus, and believed especially in his sayings, and above all thought that an authentic nucleus was distinguishable in the Sermon on the Mount.

It is no longer necessary to enter upon a criticism of these positions in detail, since the last sixty years have not been unfruitful in respect to them. During that period much that is new has been learned through the scientific investigation of the life of Jesus. But even if the principle of the mythical explanation has not proved wholly invulnerable, its application was in

itself a vast step in advance. The supernatural and rationalistic explanations were once for all got rid of in favor of one which sought to come closer to the facts by a method derived from the matter itself. This attempt was the more effective because Strauss moved on ground where results could be verified, and allowed arbitrary fancy to have no influence on his work.

It is worth while, however, to direct attention to another point. I have already remarked that Baur always maintained an attitude of reserve toward Strauss' work, bestowing upon it a somewhat cold recognition. Strauss rightly interpreted this attitude on the part of his master, and said once in writing to Märklin: "I can also partly understand this from the circumstances themselves. I am no historian; I have been prompted by dogmatic [or antidogmatic] interests; and he may disapprove of this from his historico-theological point of view."

This self-judgment is perfectly just. Whoever has attained independent insight into the critical work of historico-theological science knows that it, like all other critical work, recognizes as its main object the investigation, one might almost say, the laying bare, of what has actually happened. The sources have again and again been examined; they have been analyzed and unraveled in order to be recomposed in as clear and coherent a form of historical development as possible. In regard to the life of Jesus the attempt has been made out of the sparse accounts to construct a credible view of his personality, aims, and course of life, just as it has been sought to give as true and historically accurate a picture as possible of the life, aims, and destiny of the representatives of the early church and of the apostolic age. Strauss himself did not at all neglect this in connection with the life of Jesus, and I do not hesitate to declare that those parts of the revised edition of his book (1864) which he called "The Life of Jesus in its Historical Setting" still retain vitality. Especially would I recommend to those who still regard Strauss as only destructive the section on the "Religious Consciousness of Jesus," which shows, as Zeller says, with what fine discernment of the loftiness and purity of a religious character Strauss was endowed.

Nevertheless the "Jesus of history" had not for him the interest with which the "Christ of faith" inspired him. The facts did not interest him as much as the ideas, and the authentic gospel history not as much as what he called the mythical history, that is, the history as it is apprehended in the hearts of believers, and has found expression through the mouths of their inspired speakers and the pens of their scribes. And here is the point where in my opinion Strauss has seen deeper than the historico-critical investigators; here is revealed for me the enduring influence of his book. We have a more correct idea than our fathers had of Jesus the Nazarene as a historical personality. We know the conditions of his activity, the soil on which he grew—his "environment," to use a modern term—much more exactly than men knew it half a century ago. We have learned to apply the psychological method much more successfully to the study of his self-consciousness. And yet, may we not say that on this very account the question as to the relation between the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith" has more vital interest in the historico-theological work of the present generation, especially in the most recent work, than that of almost any other question? Only we now regard this problem with other eyes than those of a generation or two ago, and seek its solution less hopefully than did young Strauss. The Hegelian philosophy, that magic key which solved the riddle for him, has slipped out of our hands. The impression left upon reflective minds by the reading of Strauss' book is in no small degree produced by the fact that in the much-quoted concluding section, entitled "The Dogmatic Significance of the Life of Jesus," all doubts are solved for the author according to Hegelian prescriptions. As an instance of this we find him declaring in the preface that "Christ's supernatural birth, and his resurrection and ascension, remain eternal truths, however much their reality as historical facts may be doubted. Only the certainty of this can give our criticism calmness and dignity, and distinguish it from the naturalistic criticism of the last century, which thought the religious truth was destroyed with the historical fact, and which must therefore of necessity be regarded as frivolous." Whoever has

thoroughly undergone the critical discipline of the last decade will readily regard such an idealism of faith as a controversial artifice. He will certainly not allow himself to be persuaded by any apologetic, however well-meaning, of the identity of the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith." For there was but one "Jesus of history," who lived only once, under perfectly definite conditions, and in perfectly definite circumstances, which do not repeat themselves. But the "Christ of faith" varies a thousand fold according to the time in which and the persons in whom he is reflected.

#### IV.

The last section of the *Leben Jesu* gives proof of the correctness of Strauss' judgment when, as we have seen, he said that he was no historian and that "everything with him proceeded from a dogmatic interest;" but he also added "or from an antidogmatic one." This addition refers to his attitude toward church doctrine. He has given it trenchant expression in his second great work, the *Christian Doctrine of Faith in its Historical Development and in its Conflict with the Modern View of the World*. This work—unfortunately, we might say—did not make the impression it was calculated to make on the great body of theologians, for whom alone it was meant. And yet this *Glaubenslehre* is a remarkable book, if it is estimated by its own standard. Its object was more frankly negative than that of the *Leben Jesu*. It was designed to show the general bankruptcy of the orthodox and rationalistic views of Christianity. Strauss actually wrote of it what he might already have written, from special points of view, of the *Leben Jesu*:

My treatise is meant, if the profane figure may be allowed, to do for dogmatic science what the balance sheet does for a mercantile house. If the house is not exactly made richer thereby, yet it learns, by means of the balance sheet, precisely how affairs stand; and this is often more valuable than a positive gain in money. Such an examination of the dogmatic stock is of the more urgent necessity in our day since the majority of theologians entertain the greatest illusion concerning it. They estimate at far too low a figure the deduction which the criticism and polemic of the last two centuries have made from the old theological stock in trade; and, on the other hand, they estimate far too highly the equivocal sources of help to be found in the

theology of feeling and the present mystical philosophy. They think that the law suits still pending in regard to those results have already been won, in large measure; and they are certain that high profit is to be got out of the newly sunk mines. It might chance, however, that those law suits might all be lost in a day, and then, if the new mines should disappoint the hopes fixed on them, bankruptcy would be inevitable. Here is reason sufficient for caution, and for exact inquiry as to how much is yet recoverable out of the previous loss and what has perhaps still to be collected; likewise what prospect there may be of surer gain from the newer enterprises, and how, taking all this into account, possessions stand in relation to debts.

And this balance was struck by Strauss with inexorable and conclusive logic. No loophole of escape was left to an opponent. "The true criticism of dogma is its history," was the central thesis of his discussion; and for everyone who knows the history and does not shrink from its practical application this thesis is thoroughgoing. Strauss' *Glaubenslehre* has also done great service to scientific inquiry. It has removed the rubbish and cleared the ground for a new building. Strauss has neither erected nor attempted to erect this new structure. When others undertook to construct it, he not only refused to give a helping hand, but stood hostile to the builders. At the end of his life he rejected that solution of the fundamental problem of doctrine which he had indicated in his closing treatise and whose influences are still clearly visible in the popular edition of the *Leben Jesu*. In *Der Alte und Neue Glaube* he propounded a new solution of the great question, which indeed occupied him to his last breath. Did he act rightly in this respect?

In the first place, the subjective veracity of the man must be frankly recognized. When at the age of sixty-four he published his *Bekenntniss* ("Confession") he sought thereby to sum up his life's performance. He did not wish to deceive himself or the public in regard to the final position of his view of the world (*Weltanschauung*), and in this he was unquestionably right, because he followed the promptings of his inmost nature. He wrote thus in Latin to the friend of his youth on sending him the book:

I have uttered the confession which the inward voice bade me utter. I have delivered my message from the first to the last letter. If I die now, it



can no longer be said that at my death I was a debtor to my contemporaries and countrymen. What I had I distributed, and what was left over is contained in this writing. . . . Regarding its fate I have not the smallest anxiety. I have done what it was my duty to do as well as I was able. Happen now what will, I shall rest in the conviction that it must happen.

But this cannot blind us to the fact that by his last book he broke off the very keystone from his life-work. In the preface to his *Leben Jesu* of 1864 he still declared that it was the duty of everyone who felt himself in a position to do so to come to the help of so many perplexed spirits who were in danger of losing the kernel along with the shell, and who felt themselves exposed to a wearing conflict, and to a dubious vacillation between unbridled unbelief and spasmodic faith, between free-thinking and piety. The task, as here sketched, had been that of his life: the *Leben Jesu*, the *Glaubenslehre*, and the smaller theological writings, particularly the *Zwei friedliche Blätter* (1839), served no other purpose. In *The Old and the New Faith* he has changed all that. Here he has himself thrown away the kernel with the shell, the thing in itself with the form. The man who was one of the most eminent of those who laid the axe to the root of the tree of the old dogmatic faith has himself fallen a victim to this faith. Harnack's words can be applied to Strauss: "This is the effect of dogma on the reverse side. It injures a man when he has it, and it injures him when he has had it; these after-effects are actually the most serious." He who possesses such deep insight into things as the author of the *Leben Jesu* and the *Glaubenslehre* could not, on the ground of a perhaps too superficial criticism of the Apostles' Creed — that old unadulterated confession of faith, as Strauss called it — give off-hand a negative answer to the question: "Are we still Christians?" His procedure in this case, however, reminds us just a little of Don Quixote and his battle with windmills. How could one like Strauss, after lightly refuting the church doctrines of transubstantiation, of the sacrificial death of the Son of God, and the anthropomorphic conception of God, come, without more ado, to declare the continued vitality of the religious content of these and similar forms in which poor humanity is doomed to enwrap eternal truth?

For a new task like this Strauss would have required, to say the least, a good equipment. But the armor which the old champion had put on was antiquated, the rust was with difficulty cleared from it, and its luster was tarnished. It was a new and yet essentially ancient philosophy, then in vogue, that had taken him captive. With Hegel he had completely done, or so he thought. Ten years before he had written to Vischer: "I still hold the Hegelian system, but it is like a loose tooth in my mouth, on which I have no more the heart to bite than you have." It was now materialism to which he did homage, and yet to which his inmost being was peculiarly in opposition. I refer here to materialism as a philosophy, as a general scheme of the universe, which is quite independent of the so-called natural-scientific method and the acceptance of its results—the materialism which celebrated its triumph in Ludwig Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff*, and of which Ernst Haeckel's monistic philosophy is only a feeble reflection.

The book *Der Alte und der Neue Glaube* found a tremendous sale in the flood-tide of that materialism which coincided with the so-called "Gründerperiode" (period of new enterprises) in Germany. Many thousands at that time eagerly devoured it, and I can very well remember how in my school days my comrades of the first and second year would come to loggerheads over it. It still haunts the brains of many cultured and innumerable half-cultured people. It has become the gospel of all those who believe that they have found faith in dogma and its products to be creations of human fancy and the offspring of human narrowness, and think that they have done with Christ and his religion. We need not quarrel over it if anyone imagines that he can get salvation through the gospel of the new faith. It is ultimately a question of our scheme of the world, in regard to which each mature thinker must form his own judgment. In any case the adherent of the materialistic view is not thereby a worse man than the follower of any other system. Nevertheless I do not think I shall meet with contradiction in maintaining that the adherents of the new faith are in general found less among those who with deep earnestness and ardent diligence

work out the questions, "Are we still Christians?" "Have we still a religion?" than among those who light-heartedly and superficially boast of having solved them.

I know not if Strauss, were he alive today in full mental vigor, would write as he did in his *Bekenntniss*. He who knows Strauss' past cannot be blind to the symptoms of a soured spirit which crop out in his last book. Especially in the first, and, in regard to the theological questions, the weightiest, part of the book, suppressed anger is manifest against those whose decree first arrested his activity, and on whom he had taken vengeance in his *The Old and the New Faith*. But we—that is, those laymen and theologians who think and feel with the author of this article—must ask: If we indorse Strauss' supposition that the forms in which the church has molded for us the beliefs of our fathers are no longer binding upon us, and are not even altogether intelligible to us, must we therefore fall into the error of his conclusion?<sup>14</sup>

There is but one Christianity, as there is but one truth and one God, but the truth does not appear to all in similar vesture. How can we wish, in the case of the pious cottager who listens devoutly to the word of God, who is poor in spirit and an heir of the kingdom of heaven according to the promise, that she should survey the heights and depths of history, that she, like us, should be continually reconsidering her views? But let us take the other side: in the case of one who honestly strives to lay a broad foundation for a comprehensive view of the world, which is certainly not that of the cottager, and who walks his own way believing in God and Christ, shall it be forbidden him to speak in his own way of the mysteries of the faith? Because not all are in a position to enjoy solid food, must adults become infants again? We would not speak in defense of a false "gnosticism," in so far as that opprobrious term is used to denote a derogatory estimate of the true "gnosis." We are not of the opinion that full salvation is intended only for the *πνευματικοί*, the spiritual men, and is withheld from the less

<sup>14</sup> Cf. with what follows the author's views in his little work, *Was heisst und zu welchem Ende studirt man Dogmengeschichte?* Freiburg i. B. und Leipzig: J. C. B. Mohr, 1895.

endowed. We are, therefore, gnostics in the good sense of that word, that is, we endeavor by the aid of the Spirit which is of God to understand the things which are given of God (1 Cor. 3:12), and, so far as we possess this Spirit, we also shall penetrate into the deep things of God. Everyone will do so according to the measure that is given him and, at all events, not according to the deliverances of an authoritatively compulsive church-teaching. The mere fact that a man named Jesus arose in Judea and there lived, taught, and died, is of no advantage to faith, any more than that he is risen and gone to heaven: it must become a matter of inner experience. For that saying of religious mysticism which has been beautifully expressed by our German poet, Angelus Silesius, remains ever true:

Wär' Christus tausendmal in Bethlehem geboren,  
Und nicht in dir, du wärest doch ewiglich verloren.<sup>15</sup>

In my judgment there has never been a thoughtful Christian, much less a theologian of lasting significance, who has not approached the historical Jesus with his own individual form of spiritual need and believing apprehension. The "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith" have never been identical. Even Paul and John formed each his own mental conception of Christ, and down to our own day it has not been otherwise.

## V.

The great outward success of Strauss' book was in no small measure due to the brilliant form in which his polemic ideas were couched. Few philosophical or theological books could be named in which the most difficult problems have been discussed with such ease. This had, no doubt, its drawback, since serious questions cannot be settled in an off-hand way. Strauss himself was aware of this. He wrote to Zeller:

In order not to fall again into the mistake of learned dulness, on which my new *Leben Jesu* [he means the popular edition of 1864] was wrecked, I wanted this time to work quite freely with compass and square; and now it is very doubtful if the work has not rather lost in order and completeness than gained in vivacity. Certainly under all circumstances so widely extended a

<sup>15</sup> "Though Christ a thousand times were born in Bethlehem,  
But not in thee, thou wert forever lost."

line of battle could not at the same time be of great depth. Weak points there must be, and this defect in the parts can only be counteracted at the risk of the whole.

These words supply a clear confirmation of the criticism we have applied to the book. But it would be wrong hence to draw the conclusion that it is of slight material; on the contrary, Strauss could justly say of it:

Flüchtig scheint es hing gesprochen,  
Flüchtig ist es nicht gemacht:  
Ausgeführt in so viel Wochen  
Als in Jahren durchgedacht.

Perhaps his occupation with Voltaire during the preceding year had some influence in brightening the style of the book, just as his acquaintance with the genial but frivolous Frenchman did not leave the earnest and, with all his versatility of form, the still serious German unaffected as to his view of the world. Certainly between Voltaire and Strauss there remained a great gulf fixed. In spite of his radicalism in philosophy and theology, Strauss always retained conservative and aristocratic sentiments in questions of public life and æsthetics. We have already seen that his political attitude cost him an adverse vote on the part of his Ludwigsburg constituents in the year 1848; and throughout life he hated nothing more than the "tyranny of the phrase, the hazy instincts and the senseless passions of the masses." Like Berengarius of Tours, he despised all *qui maluerunt errare cum pluribus quam verius sentire cum paucis*. Whoever wishes to convince himself how little this man was disposed to speak in defense of the novelties of the hour, let him read the splendid appendices to *The Old and the New Faith*. Here he has treated of our great poets and musicians in a way which might be called classical, for it would be difficult to find elsewhere so much that is good and excellent said in so few words on the subject of Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, and of other German heroes in poetry and music. But the more stormy music was scarcely in his line. Father Haydn and Mozart were Strauss' musical ideals. "Mozart and music are synonymous in a way in which we have no other quite corresponding example in the domain of music nor of any other art."

He composed a beautiful sonnet on Beethoven's "Symphony in A-major;" but he would have nothing to do with the "Pastoral Symphony," and least of all with the "Ninth". One cannot wonder, therefore, that he had no appreciation of Richard Wagner's art and "seized every opportunity of emphatically expressing aversion to him alike as a man and a musician" (letter to Rapp of March 17, 1869). Here, however, we find his limitations as a critic, and hence we have a view of the partial character of much of his theological and philosophical criticism.

But the final key to those inconsistencies of his personality to which we pointed at the outset will be found in the view that he was predominantly a man of feeling, to whom the gift of dialectic thought, which, as a true Schwabian, he possessed in a high degree, was given for a thorn in the flesh. Whoever reads his letters, especially the later ones, whoever has been touched by the notes of his poetry, especially the poem written on his death-bed, knows that this man, with the intellect of a heathen, possessed the heart of a Christian, and that his sentiments were more pious than those of many who upbraided him as a heretic and an unbeliever.

The poetry of Strauss reveals a man of deep and earnest thought and feeling; and certainly the life-work, wrought from motives ever earnest and pure, by one who so thought and felt, was not wrought in vain. His *Leben Jesu*, regarded from a scientific point of view, can be fitly described as an act of emancipation, and the year 1835 marks an epoch for historico-theological science. His saying, "The true criticism of dogma is its history," has not only become a winged word, but it is also permanently a true word. Theological science has reason enough to keep this saying constantly in view at the close of this nineteenth century, in which it has certainly made much progress, but also much retrogression. Without Strauss we should not stand where we do. That he himself was aware of this I have already said, and I cannot close without recalling the verses in which he has boldly and admirably expressed that conviction:

## AUSGLEICHUNG.

Wenn Du um eine Geistes that  
 So von der Mitwelt wirst geschmäht,  
 Dass selbst der Freund, der Kamerad  
 Dir schauernd aus dem Wege geht :  
 Dann hoch des Haupt und hoch den Sinn !  
 Dann lache der gelehrten Herrn !  
 Denn über alle hoch dahin  
 Geht leuchtend Deines Geistes Stern !  
 Doch wenn sich's wendet, wenn's nun heisst :  
 Man that dem Mann zu viel der Schmach !  
 Dann eingezogen ! Es beweist :  
 Nun kommen Dir auch Andre nach !  
 Und wenn man endlich Ruh' Dir gönnt  
 Und noch ein Stückchen Ruhm dazu :  
 Dann, Alter, hat's mit Dir ein End' ;  
 Dann ist die Welt so klug wie Du.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Reproduced by the translator of this article in the following words :

## REPARATION.

When for a message new and bold  
 By thy coevals thou art scorned,  
 And even thy friend and comrade old  
 Has horror-stricken from thee turned ;  
 Then march with head and mind erect,  
 Flout the decrees of learned divines ;  
 For on the world all cloud-bedeckt  
 Thy spirit's star benignant shines.  
 But when the tide has turned, you'll hear  
 Them say, This man too much we wrong :  
 Then keep the background, for 'tis clear  
 That crowds will soon thy footsteps throng.  
 And when at length they give thee peace,  
 And e'en a little fame thereto,  
 Then, graybeard, comes thy long release,  
 And now the world is wise as thou.